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ACTION

February 12, 1970

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MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: John H. Holdridge

SUBJECT: Special National Intelligence Estimate on North Vietnam

We have received the Special National Intelligence Estimate on North Vietnam, and prepared the memorandum from you to the President reporting the contents of the SNIE.

RECOMMENDATION:

That you sign the attached memorandum to the President at Tab A.

Att.

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JHH:WRS:pmh 2/12/70

INFORMATION

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Special National Intelligence Estimate on Factors Affecting  
North Vietnam's Policy on the Vietnam War

The attached Special National Intelligence Estimate on North Vietnam (Tab A) concludes the following:

-- The most likely course for Hanoi during 1970 is to pursue prolonged war tactics much along present lines. The North Vietnamese will continue to try to maintain sufficient military pressure to impose U.S. casualties, to inflict setbacks on Vietnamization and pacification and perhaps to engage in major tests of Vietnamization.

-- The Communists will not be prepared to negotiate a general settlement in Vietnam, but they might see some utility in probing the possibility of arrangements which might hasten or fix a timetable for U.S. withdrawal. In this process, any concessions that Hanoi might make would be limited and not aimed at an overall settlement. Hanoi is counting on the odds swinging in its favor once the U.S. withdrawal has become militarily significant.

-- Hanoi will not undertake an all-out military effort which would involve greater risks and heavier losses than it seems willing to contemplate at this time. Moreover, such action taken in the next six months would slow U.S. departure rather than hasten it.

-- The Communists are in trouble in South Vietnam, and they recognize it themselves. They fear that they have overemphasized military action and neglected the political and subversive base. They are now making a great effort to restructure their apparatus in South Vietnam and enhance its staying power.

-- While the Communists believe that they can prevail over the South Vietnamese Government structure over the long run, they cannot be certain of this so long as U.S. forces are in the South. They believe

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that Vietnamization presents the risk of an indefinite American presence, and they thus see themselves faced for the first time with an allied strategy designed to challenge their fundamental assumption. They see the Vietnamization program as essentially fragile but they recognize that it might work long enough and well enough to give the GVN a fair chance of holding its own. Hanoi particularly fears the pacification program.

-- Ho Chi Minh's death has complicated the task of achieving a united policy in Hanoi, though the leadership does not yet seem immobilized or in a state of disarray over policy differences or succession disputes.

-- North Vietnam is suffering from economic problems, popular malaise and a degree of disaffection with the regime's goals, and from manpower problems which are perhaps more qualitative than quantitative. There has been a general domestic letdown within the North. This situation has probably compelled the leadership to give more of its attention to the North than it has had to do in earlier years.

-- The Sino-Soviet conflict, if it remains at present levels, is a complicating but not determining factor in North Vietnamese policy calculations. Even if hostilities break out, the North Vietnamese leadership would be reasonably certain that it would still get the support it needs. However, if the hostilities spread and persist, Hanoi would deem it prudent to scale down its effort in the South and perhaps to move toward a cease-fire.

Comment: The judgments contained in the estimate impress us as being valid. We would add, though, that the estimate's analysis of Hanoi's policy glosses over somewhat the real dilemmas which Hanoi currently faces. To challenge the pacification program it must commit its main force units which it has been holding in the base areas along the Cambodian and Laotian borders; however, these units when committed run the risk of heavy losses and military defeat. On the other hand, if it holds back its main force units to avoid casualties and to keep its forces in being, its infrastructure in the countryside continues to suffer under the pacification program and its access to the people for food supply and combat support erodes further. The longer it delays, the worse off it finds itself militarily in the South -- always the key element in Hanoi's calculations. Meanwhile, by stalling on the negotiations, Hanoi permits the U.S. to carry out Vietnamization at its own pace. The alternative is to offer concessions which the North Vietnamese are presently loathe to make. We believe we can see the pressures beginning to build up on Hanoi for some movement -- the French Delegate General in Hanoi, for example, has reported that the North Vietnamese leaders seem depressed and aware that things have not gone as planned -- although we doubt that any policy changes have yet been decided upon.

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